



## **CITY OF SUNNYVALE REPORT Planning Commission**

**September 13, 2004**

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**SUBJECT: 2004-0469 – City of Sunnyvale Study Issue:** Revive Auto Dealer Decorative Banner Program. This study examines whether to adopt a pilot program or codify provisions to allow decorative banners for auto dealers at certain locations along El Camino Real. Staff recommends that a permanent Decorative Banner Program be established with the City's auto dealers.

### **REPORT IN BRIEF**

The Decorative Banner Program was originally established in 1996 and renewed in 1997. This program focused on decorative banners for auto retail establishments along El Camino Real. At the time, City Council approved a pilot program with the intent to review the effectiveness at its conclusion and determine whether the program should be discontinued or made permanent. The program was not continued due to a lack of auto dealer participation. As noted in the "Background" section of this report, a renewed interest for a decorative banner concept was identified as an outcome from the New-Car Auto-Dealers' Subcommittee created by the Mayor.

The concept of the decorative banner program is to create a harmonious and unified streetscape and strengthen the collective identity of the City's auto retail establishments. With revisions to the previous program, staff finds that a new decorative banner program can help promote the awareness of the City's Auto dealerships without negatively impacting the visual character of El Camino Real.

### **BACKGROUND**

In 1996, the City Council adopted a banner program for a one-year period to evaluate the overall effectiveness of the program. Council members expressed an interest in determining whether the program directly affected auto sales within the City. In 1997, when the first review was conducted, fiscal data was not available to determine whether the program provided a beneficial impact. The program was approved for an additional year; however, the Association eventually disbanded and the program was not continued. More recently, a new auto dealer association has formed and there is a renewed interest for collective marketing and advertising of the City's auto retail businesses. The Sunnyvale Auto Dealer Association considers auto dealers located on Santa Clara's Stevens Creek Boulevard and San Jose's Capitol Expressway as their

direct competitors. Many of the City's auto dealers feel that these locations are able to promote their businesses more effectively through signs due to less stringent regulations in place. (See Attachment #3 for photos of banner signs on Stevens Creek Boulevard and Capitol Expressway.)

Currently, there is no cohesive banner program established for auto dealers along Stevens Creek Boulevard in Santa Clara. Banners are permitted for businesses through a temporary sign permit procedure. There are no separate sign regulations in place for auto retail uses. In San Jose, an organized banner program is not in place. The San Jose Municipal Code permits increased signage for businesses located within a special zoning district for the "Capitol Expressway Auto Mall." The ordinance specifies allowances for multiple attached signs provided that other regulations are met including size, setbacks, and height. Staff notes that it is not clear if the existing banners comply with local regulations.

In January of this year, the New-Car Auto-Dealers' Subcommittee made up of Councilmember Julia Miller, Councilmember Ron Swegles, and Planning Commissioner Laura Babcock, looked into how the City can support auto-dealers with cooperative marketing and other programs that may help increase their presence within Sunnyvale. The subcommittee met with eleven auto-dealers located in Sunnyvale to understand the concerns and collect ideas that may help address those concerns. In an effort to form a collective group that could draw more customers to Sunnyvale, the "Sunnyvale Auto Dealers Association" was created. The auto dealers commented that much of their competition is directly with auto dealers located at Stevens Creek Auto Row and Capitol Expressway Auto Row. Many of the concerns from auto dealers relate to signs and the current restrictions within the current Sunnyvale Municipal Code. Planning staff is currently conducting a study to review the other sign regulations for auto dealerships and will report to Planning Commission and Council at a later date.

City Council also directed staff to look into reviving an ordinance that was originally passed in 1996 and renewed in 1997. This uncodified ordinance permitted decorative banners for auto dealers for a period of one year. Following this review, the City Council could approve the proposed banner program either as a pilot program or as a permanent revision to the Code.

## **EXISTING POLICY**

### **General Plan Goals and Policies**

The following General Plan policies and goals apply to the subject discussion.

	<b>Goal or Policy</b>
<b>Community Design Sub-Element</b>	Policy A.3 Support measures which enhance the identity of special districts and residential neighborhoods to create more variety in the physical environment
<b>Community Design Sub-Element</b>	Policy B.3 Minimize elements which clutter the roadway and look unattractive.
<b>Community Design Sub-Element</b>	Goal C. Ensure that buildings and related site improvements for private development are well designed and compatible with surrounding properties and districts.
<b>Community Design Sub-Element</b>	The Community Design Sub-Element also states "...areas of El Camino Real with car dealerships could have colorful vertical banners on the street lights, identifying the type of business and each type of dealership."
<b>Socio-Economic Element</b>	Policy 5.1B.2 Participate in partnerships with local industry/businesses in order to facilitate communication and address mutual concerns.
<b>El Camino Real Precise Plan</b>	The Joint Venture Program will include, but will not be limited to assessing; the use of special types of signage or identification for different areas along El Camino Real

## **DISCUSSION**

A total of 94 decorative banners were installed on light standards on private property at fourteen participating auto retail sites along El Camino Real in September 1996. The final banner design was created by the auto dealer association's advertising agency and then produced and installed by a banner design firm. The Sunnyvale Auto Dealer Association is currently working with an advertising agency to develop a new banner design that could accommodate any possible changes that are adopted with a new program. A common sentiment of the City's auto dealers is that the previously approved banner did not provide enough visibility and tended to fade over time.

On August 19, planning staff met with Sunnyvale auto dealers to discuss a new decorative banner program. Overall, the auto dealers felt that the idea of a collective decorative banner program was a good concept that should be reinstated. Upon review of the previous program (See 1997 Ordinance in

Attachment 2), new recommendations were made by the auto dealers in an effort to provide an updated program that could accommodate increased visibility and more flexibility. The Sunnyvale Auto Dealers Association recommended the following modifications from the previous program:

- A maximum 20 sq. ft. instead of 16 sq. ft. per banner.
- Two decorative banners per pole (one decorative banner as part of a comprehensive program plus one unique banner for individual special events)
- Banners to be installed on every light pole along frontage of site instead of one per 30 feet.
- Minimum mounting height of 7 or 8 feet (instead of 9 feet) from top of curb
- No requirement to change the banner design every 6 months.
- Allow differentiation amongst banners to include logo of the auto dealer (while also including “Sunnyvale Auto Row” on each banner).

On August 23, a Planning Commission Study Session was held regarding the new decorative banner program. At that time, Commissioners expressed various concerns related to the program and the recommendations made by the Auto Dealer Association. The following issues were discussed:

- Enforcement of banners
- 20 sq. ft. seems too large
- Length of time for second banner? (Special event)
- 7 foot mounting height seems too low
- Banner program should not be permanent – a review of the program should be considered to determine effectiveness
- Banners should be changed periodically
- Is there a way to measure program effectiveness?

In order to meet the goals of the program to establish a collective identity along El Camino Real, it is critical that all banners along this important transportation corridor comply with an established ordinance. The enforcement against illegal signage is important to the City and the Auto Dealer Association to ensure beneficial results of the collective program. In addition to

enforcement conducted by the City's Neighborhood Preservation Division, a certain amount of self-vigilance is expected from auto dealers along El Camino Real.

### **Banner Size**

The previous program included a maximum 16 sq.ft. banner to provide adequate visibility of auto-dealer sites without causing a significant visual distraction to motorists traveling along El Camino Real. Staff notes that an approved design from the previous program was approximately 14 sq. ft. Standard size banners measure approximately 24 x 60 inches [10 sq. ft.], 28 x 72 inches [14 sq. ft.], or 30 x 72 inches [15 sq. ft.]. As banners become larger they start to visually clutter the frontage of properties along the street and would increase distractions to motorists. Larger size banners need different brackets/hardware due to increased wind loads

### **Number/Spacing of Banners**

The previous program allowed one banner per 30 feet of frontage of the site, which results in one banner per light pole for most businesses. Every pole does not have to be 30 feet apart, however; a minimum separation of ten feet is required. Staff notes that at the time the previous ordinance was adopted, the 30 foot standard allowed a banner on every light pole. Multiple banners attached to a specific light pole may be overly distractive to the public and not meet the objective of an aesthetically appealing program.

A "Promotional Event" banner may be considered for a specified period of time off the frontage. As this feature is an enhancement to the previous program, it is recommended that it be evaluated as part of the other study on auto dealer signage. Staff would evaluate number, duration, and location of these signs.

### **Mounting Height**

The previous requirement was for a mounting height of nine feet. A minimum mounting height of eight feet, as requested by auto dealers, could be retained for the approved decorative banner program. A banner positioned lower than eight feet may have improved visibility but may also be subject to a higher likelihood of physical impairment or vandalism. Previously, the banner designers and installers recommended that the banner size and heights be coordinated. A larger banner necessitates a higher mounting position. Also, pole heights suggest an optimal banner height and size.

### **Duration**

The previous program required change out of the banners two to four times a year. The findings from the previous review were related to the importance to promote some variety and “freshness” for the duration of the program. Change-out of the banners to a maximum duration of six months may also promote maintenance of the banners and ensure conformity for the program among auto dealer sites. A consistent banner design becomes “background” visuals and is not effective in attracting frequent El Camino Real drivers and passengers. Of course, it would appear “new” to a new or infrequent user.

### **Design**

A newly approved banner design could illustrate bolder colors to increase visibility of the auto dealership while enhancing the overall streetscape along El Camino Real. Additionally, utilizing more contrasting colors with some variation of the banners on each lot can prove to be effective. Fading would be minimized with the use of higher quality fabrics and enforcing change-outs of banners after a specified period of time. The final design of the banners will be subject to review and approval by staff. This design, submitted with a formal application, could include a common logo such as “Sunnyvale Auto Row” on the banner. Each participating auto dealer may also incorporate a company logo at the bottom of the banners that are located on their specific lot.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

If the program is successful in better identifying auto retail uses along El Camino Real, an increase in City’s sales tax revenue may result due to increased auto sales. All uses along El Camino Real may benefit from making El Camino Real an attractive street.

### **CONCLUSION**

Staff finds that a high quality banner program creates a stronger and more unified Sunnyvale image that can attract and promote retail activity. The desire to enhance the aesthetic appearance of El Camino Real along with the recognition of auto dealerships as important retail uses along El Camino Real were primary motives for initiating the original pilot private decorative banner program. Re-establishing a decorative banner program can ultimately create a unified presence to support auto retail establishments.

Although, staff could not find any data that indicates a certain financial benefit from the previous banner program, staff finds that the program has been effective in demonstrating a shared identity in Sunnyvale. Therefore, staff

recommends that the Decorative Banner Program be established as a permanent ordinance.

As noted in the report, the new ordinance (Attachment "A") governs auto retail establishments' decorative banner displays and regulates their location, quantity, size, and distance between decorative banners, their mounting height, materials, hardware, duration, program participation and maintenance. These decorative banners would be positioned on private light poles along the street frontage. The administrative review process and application fee is expected to be modeled after the process established for Master Sign Programs should the Autodealership Banner Program become permanent. Minor modifications to the Banner Program could also be handled through an administrative process.

The table below indicates the recommended decorative banner regulations and requirements:

<b>Regulations</b>	<b>1996/1997</b>	<b>New Program Recommendations</b>
<b>Quantity</b>	1 decorative banner per 30 feet of street frontage	Same
<b>Size</b>	Minimum of 8 square feet. Maximum of 16 sq. ft.	Same
<b>Height</b>	Minimum mounting height of 9 feet from top of curb	Minimum mounting height of 8 feet from top of curb
<b>Separation</b>	Minimum 10 feet distance between banners	Same
<b>Duration</b>	Maximum of 6 months for a given set of banners; up to a maximum of 4 sets of banners in a 12 month period	Same
<b>Location</b>	Shall be located entirely on private property	Same
<b>Maintenance</b>	High quality materials and hardware are to be used in combination with prompt maintenance.	Same

<b>Participation</b>	Requires participation of minimum of 51% of automobile dealers (new/used) on El Camino Real	Same
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### **ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW**

This action is exempt pursuant to Title 14 of the California Code of Regulations, Section 15061(b)(3), that this ordinance is exempt from the requirements of the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) that only applies to projects which have the potential for causing a significant effect on the environment.

### **PUBLIC CONTACT**

This item is listed on the Planning Commission agenda, posted on the City's web site and a legal ad was published in the *Sunnyvale Sun* newspaper on the City's official notice bulletin board.

Planning staff met with auto dealers on August 19 to discuss the program and to solicit comments and recommendations. These comments have been included in the report.

### **ALTERNATIVES**

1. Adopt the Auto Dealership Decorative Banner Program as a permanent program.
2. Implement the Auto Dealership Decorative Banner program as a pilot program for a specified period of time.
3. Direct staff to include "Promotional Event" banners in the larger study of auto dealership signage.
4. Do not adopt Auto Dealership Decorative Banner Program



## **RECOMMENDATION**

Staff recommends Alternative 1 as the program successfully creates a collective identity for auto dealers and benefits the overall streetscape of El Camino Real. Therefore, staff recommends that the Decorative Banner Program be established as a permanent ordinance.

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## **Attachments**

1. Draft Ordinance
2. Previous Decorative Banner Program Ordinance (1997)
3. Examples of other communities' banners